

FACT SHEET



CHOOSING SNACKS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Children need between-meal snacks because they have small stomachs and require small amounts of food more frequently than adults.

Choosing healthy snacks for your child is important. Snacks based on fruit and vegetables, reduced fat dairy products (for children over 2 years of age) and whole grains will contribute to your child's nutritional needs and improve the overall quality of their diet. Snack foods that are high in added sugar, saturated fat or salt are generally low in nutrients and often provide unwanted kilojoules that can contribute to your child becoming overweight or obese.



Selecting a healthier snack

The easiest way to restrict unhealthy snacks is simply not to buy them on a regular basis. Children will tend to snack on what is readily available so stock the pantry, fruit bowl and fridge with healthy snacks and include them in the lunchbox.

There are many commercial snack foods available in the supermarket of varying nutritional value. When choosing grain-based snacks, select those that are high in fibre and preferably wholegrain.

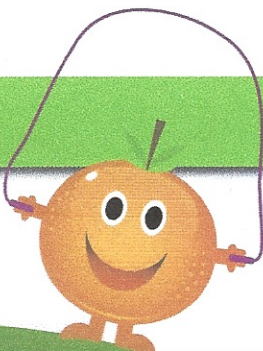
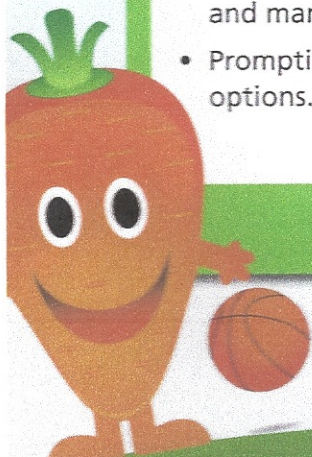
OTHER THINGS TO TRY TO INCLUDE:

- Talking with your children and set limits on the number of less healthy snack foods that you allow them to have per week. This includes snacks such as lollies, chocolate bars, donuts, some fruit bars, cereal bars and muesli bars, potato/corn chips, hot chips and many types of savoury and sweet biscuits; and
- Prompting your children to select healthier snack options.

Healthy Snack Ideas:

SOME HEALTHY SNACK IDEAS TO TRY INCLUDE:

- Fresh, frozen or dried fruit;
- Reduced fat fruit yoghurt;
- Reduced fat cheese slices on wholegrain crackers or crispbread;
- Reduced fat custard with fruit;
- Potatoes topped with reduced fat cheese and baked in the microwave or oven;
- Toasted sandwiches with baked beans;
- Rice crackers or corn cakes;
- Scones or pikelets (plain, fruit or savoury);
- Toasted English style muffin, preferably wholemeal; or
- Fruit muffins (small serve).



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YOUNG CHILDREN AND FUSSY EATING

Feeding young children can be a challenging experience. Preschool aged children often have small appetites and very definite likes and dislikes.

Establishing healthy eating patterns is important to avoid problems such as obesity and eating disorders later in life.



Here are some tips to prevent (or minimise) fussy eating by young children:

Don't give up. Keep trying to offer healthy foods. A child might need to see a food up to ten times before they feel comfortable enough to try it. Try presenting new foods in different ways and with other familiar foods.

Reinforce. Encourage good eating behaviours in small children. When they do eat something healthy, congratulate them – even if it is just for trying one mouthful of a new healthy food.

Role Model. Let your children see you eating and enjoying healthy food. Involve young children in purchasing and preparing healthy food.

Consistency. Keep regular meal and snack times.

Stay Calm. If your child frequently resists food, mealtimes can become stressful. Avoid force feeding and do not feel resentful if your child refuses to eat.

Variety. Offer a range of healthy foods on the plate and allow your child to pick and choose what they will eat.

Take responsibility. Parents need to take responsibility for what, when and where children eat. Your child is responsible for how much they eat. If children don't eat what you have served then don't worry, just take the food away, cover it, refrigerate it (for a short time only) and offer it one more time later on when they are hungry.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER...

- Children eat when they are hungry.
- Assess your child's food intake over the week, rather than daily.
- If you are worried about your child's diet – speak to your doctor or an Accredited Practising Dietitian.



Choose water as a drink

Water is the best drink when you are thirsty. Water is good as it does not have any added sugar. Drinking tap water also helps your child develop strong teeth. Water in Australia is safe to drink straight from the tap or boiled if you prefer; either way it still contains fluoride.

Tips to help your child to drink more water

- Take a bottle of water when you go out.
- Put a bottle of water in with your child's lunch.
- Keep cold water in the fridge at home.
- Give your child a water bottle when they play sport.



Limit soft drinks, sports drinks and cordial

Fruit juices, soft drink, sports drinks and cordials should not be given to your child everyday as they can have lots of added sugar. If you do give your child juices, soft drinks, sports drinks or cordials remember:

- water these down until you can replace them with water
- serve in smaller cups
- limit the number of cups your child has each day.

The facts about fruit juice

- Fruit juice can be high in natural and added sugar.
- A piece of fruit is better than a glass of juice.
- One small cup of fruit juice each day is enough for your child.



Milk is a healthy option

- Milk helps your child develop strong teeth and bones.
- Children over 2 years of age should drink reduced fat (not skim) milk.
- Reduced fat milk has less fat than full cream milk but still has lots of nutrients that young children need.
- Soy milk is suitable if it is reduced fat and has added calcium.



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Eat more fruit and vegetables

Eating fruit and vegetables will help your child grow strong and healthy. Children aged 4 – 7 years should eat 1 serve of fruit and 2 serves of vegetables each day.

What is a serve?

1 serve of fruit is:

- 1 cup of canned or chopped fruit *or*
- 1 medium fruit such as apple, banana *or*
- 2 smaller pieces of fruit such as apricots *or*
- 1½ tablespoons of dried fruit



1 serve of vegetables is:

- 1 cup of lettuce or salad vegetables *or*
- ½ cup of green leafy vegetables such as broccoli or spinach *or*
- 1 medium potato

Tips to get your child eating fruit and vegetables

- Cut up the fruit and vegetables so it is easy to eat.
- Offer a range of fruit and vegetables to try.
- Offer the fruit and vegetables in different ways, such as raw, sliced, mashed, baked or grated.
- Try canned fruit or small amounts of dried fruit.
- Offer fruit and vegetables with foods your child already enjoys.



Children may need to try new foods 8-9 times before they will like them

Easy ways to eat more fruit and vegetables each day

- Put fruit on breakfast cereal.
- Add extra vegetables to main meals such as casserole, stir-fry, curry or home made pizzas.
- Pack sliced fruit or vegetable sticks to take to pre-school.
- Make a smoothie with fresh, canned or frozen fruit.
- Add fresh fruit to yoghurt.
- Snack on corn on the cob.
- Put salad on sandwiches.

Try and make fruit and vegetables part of every meal or snack

Tips to help you make healthy choices at home

- Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables yourself. When your child sees you eating these foods they will want them too.
- Grow some vegetables in the garden and let your child water and look after them.



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REDUCING YOUNG CHILDREN'S TELEVISION AND ELECTRONIC GAMES TIME

The time children spend sitting and watching television or playing electronic games (known as 'screen-time') is time children could spend being active. We know from research that Australian children are spending too much time being sedentary and not enough time being active. This can lead to health problems now and in the future.



The Australian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that children aged 2 – 5 years should not spend more than **one hour a day** watching television or using other electronic media (DVDs computer and other electronic games). The guidelines also state that children less than 2 years of age should spend **no time** in these activities. Screen-based activities for children under two years have not been shown to lead to any improvements in health, intelligence or language development.

Tips for parents to reduce children's 'small-screen' time

- **Set limits on your child's TV watching and time spent playing electronic/computer games** – monitor how much screen-time your child engages in. You may be surprised at how many hours it actually is! Decide on a time limit, communicate this to your child and stick to it.
- **Designate certain days of the week as 'screen-free' days** – it's good for children to have one or more days during the week when there is no TV or computer games allowed. You may need to suggest active indoor and outdoor alternatives for your child to occupy them on these days.
- **Leave the TV off** – only have the TV on when it's being watched, otherwise turn it off and use music for 'background noise'.
- **Eat at the table and leave the TV off** – try to eat at the table as a family, not in front of the TV.
- **Be selective about what your child watches** – most children will happily sit and watch whatever is on the screen for hours on end if allowed to do so. Be selective. Use your child's allocated screen-time to watch quality children's programs they enjoy. You might want to record your child's favourite programs so that they can be viewed at a time that suits you better.
- **Keep TV's and computers out of your child's bedroom** – keep these in a common area of the house so that you can monitor use.
- **Be an active role model** – monitor your own small-screen time and physical activity and make sure you are leading by example. Allow time to be active with your child.



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CHOOSING DRINKS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Water Drinking water is the best way to quench thirst without getting the sugar and kilojoules found in sweetened drinks. Drinking water instead of sweetened drinks helps prevent dental problems and the Fluoride found in tap water also helps children develop strong teeth.

Milk Milk is a good source of Calcium and is important for the growth of strong bones and teeth.

- Reduced fat or lite milks should be encouraged for children over the age of two years. Reduced fat milks contain much the same nutrients as full-cream milks except they are lower in saturated fats and therefore in energy content.
- Children under two years of age should not drink reduced fat milks as they have higher energy requirements than older children.

Fruit Juice Fruit juice is often regarded as a healthy choice as it contains Vitamin C. However one small glass (125mls) of most juices provides a child's daily requirement for Vitamin C. More than this amount provides excess sugar and kilojoules that can contribute to weight gain. A piece of fruit is a better choice than juice as it provides fibre.

Soft drinks, cordials and sports drinks Regular soft drinks, cordials, sports drinks and flavoured mineral waters can contain large amounts of sugar and kilojoules. These drinks are not a necessary part of a healthy diet and should only be consumed occasionally – not everyday.

Did you know?

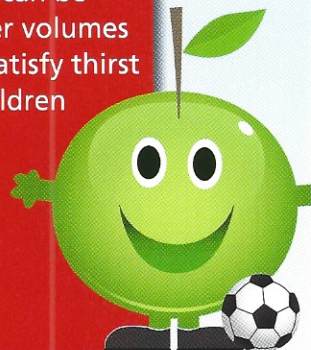
- Children who regularly drink soft drink and other sweetened drinks are more likely to be overweight.
- 37% of children aged 2-4 drink one or more cups of soft drink each week, with over 22% drinking six or more cups a week.

Ideas to encourage your child to drink more water

- Pack a water bottle whenever you go out.
- In summer, put a frozen water bottle in your child's lunch box.
- Have cold water available at all times at home instead of sweetened drinks.
- When participating in active play or sports, encourage your child to drink water rather than sports/energy drinks.
- If you already offer juices, sports energy drinks and cordials, gradually water them down until your child is happy to replace these with plain water.
- Use smaller glasses if you do offer sugary drinks for children and limit the number and serve size of sugary drinks they have.

Remember:

- If you always offer sweetened drinks, children will be less likely to choose plain water.
- If you are going to offer your children sweetened drinks on occasions, healthier options are those drinks and waters with just a hint of sweetness (less than three grams of sugar per 100ml). These can be consumed in larger volumes (up to 500ml) to satisfy thirst without giving children excess sugar or a preference for strongly sweetened drinks.



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Get active each day

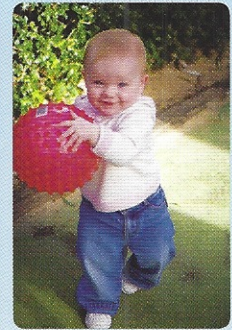
Physical activity is an important part of being healthy. Being active:

- builds strong bones and muscles
- improves balance
- is a good way to make friends
- helps children keep to a healthy weight.

Every day toddlers and preschool children should:

- be physically active for at least 3 hours, spread throughout the day.
- not be sitting for more than 1 hour at a time.

Physical activity can be done in small amounts over the day. Your child can start slowly and then do a little more each day.



Help your child be more active

- Turn off the TV and go outside to play.
- Play together.
- Get active as a family.
- Go for a walk to the local park.
- Go for a bike ride together.
- When buying gifts for your children, choose ones they can use to be active eg bats and balls.
- Let them try a range of activities.
- Let them choose activities that they enjoy.



Turn off the TV and get active!

- Your child should spend no more than 1 hour a day watching TV, DVDs or playing computer games.
- Help your child to be active in as many ways as they can during the day.
- Find active indoor and outdoor games for your child to play instead of watching TV.
- Limit the amount of time your child spends playing computer games or on the internet by using a roster or timer.
- Do not have a TV or computer in your child's bedroom.

When being active remember to:

- Wear safe and stable shoes.
- Wear sunscreen and a hat when outside.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Have fun.

